

Bay Bridge Plan --- "Stuck on Process"

Dear Editor:

The real story behind the Bay Bridge delay has more to do with process than anything else. No matter how we may feel about the design or even building the new bridge, there is a process that has to be followed and too many people are losing sight of that. When you have a project to build a new bridge, especially a connection of this vital importance, there are certain issues that must be looked at. This is not just a seismic retrofit, this is building a new bridge that is vastly different, in both appearance, and capability.

The federally required Environmental Impact Statement for the Project, has not been completed, and it has not been certified. The approved new design is nothing more than a preferred alternative at this point. I wonder how anyone can just say we should march forward without the completion of the environmental work. The Draft EIS document was substantially inadequate, and will most likely have to be revised and recirculated before this project can go anywhere.

The Federal Environmental Protection Agency gave the Draft EIS its lowest rating in history. We may just realize that we don't need a new bridge after all, depending on how thorough the environmental review is. . After working on this project for more than two years, I realize that we don't really need a new bridge, and that the existing East Span can be retrofitted for only \$300 million dollars.

If we look further into the design selection process we will find the chairperson of the peer review panel that assisted CalTrans with its determination of whether or not we need a new bridge, works for the TY Linn Company, the same people who were awarded the contract for the new bridge. MTC Staff and CalTrans recommended against future rail on the bridge, and accordingly, every design selection that was submitted, showing future rail on the bridge was summarily dismissed. The selection of potential designs were narrowed way down before they ever got to MTC Commissioners. We need to take a serious look at moving forward the retention and retrofit of the existing bridge and be done with it. Rather than continuing to waste substantial sums of money and time trying to push for a new bridge that is not necessary, has questionable seismic capability, and real limitations on the future transit use of the bridge, and a whole myriad of problems which will tie this project up for quite some time. We are getting a new bridge with substantially less load bearing capability which the draft environmental impact statement, just overlooks.

This project is trying to defy the environmental process, and federal law is just not going to let it happen that way. According to a CalTrans news release, dated Fall, 1998 "*to expedite the project CalTrans is conducting design, simultaneously, with the environmental review process, and then begin detailed design. Following the standard sequential approach would extend the timeframe for completing the Project. Conducting the two processes concurrently allows the project to be built sooner, thus meeting the public safety needs earlier. In using the concurrent approach CalTrans make certain assumptions about the outcome of the environmental review. If the assumptions are incorrect, then the project design would be adjusted to be consistent with the environmental process.*" CalTrans already recognizes they are not following procedure. Certainly a design cannot be chosen before the environmental review is complete. I think it's important, before we try to blame anybody, that the project sponsors are not complying with the environmental review process. That's the only way the project will ever get off the ground.

Sincerely, **Ken Bukowski** Emeryville Vice-Mayor

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